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How has Hollywood glamour within cinema influenced staged portraiture within contemporary photography?

Hollywood glamour portraits came into fashion in the 1930s, following the increasing popularity of cinema. Over this period, the idea of glamour was moving towards a new meaning, becoming recognised as a style that could be replicated among the stars in Hollywood.

This essay aims to analyse Hollywood glamour, asking how it was used in cinema and how cinema has influenced staged portraiture within contemporary photographic practice. In terms of the methodology, this essay shall draw upon gender theory of Katherine Farrimond from her book, *The contemporary femme fatale*, concerning cinema as a cinematic trope that epitomised in the film noir era of Hollywood cinema.

The glamour epitomised in portrait photographs of Hollywood stars such as Elizabeth Taylor, Marilyn Monroe, Audrey Hepburn, Lauren Bacall and more. The photographs that made the stars from that era made the actresses into the icons of their time. These photographs also make us remember the actors, as we may forget the films they were in, we remember the photographs of them. The photographs of 'ordinary people' turned icons, were arranged by major Hollywood studios, such as MGM (Metro- Goldwyn- Mayer) and Paramount who would hire photographers to produce a Hollywood glamour look in order to publicise their films.

The leading photographers were 'Albert Witzel, George Hurrell, Clarence Bull, Ruth Harriet Louise, Milton Greene and Cecil Beaton' (2019) who were all known for their portraits of the Hollywood stars at this time. These photographs allowed to give the viewers, the public audience access to their favourite idols while also being a method to

advertise, not just the films, but the actors themselves. This style of photography creates an illusion, which has a feeling of 'otherworldly beauty'. To make sure there was a standard that had to be kept. The studios made sure the Hollywood stars were guided, in regards to the publicity shoots. The major studios made sure they were taken from the 'best' photographer at that time and had a team to make sure the actors looked 'their' best. Due to the studios making a profit from this, as everyone wanting to see their favourite icons in the cinema. The actors also had to keep a standard with appearances while they were seen in public. George Hurrell, who was an American photographer employed by MGM. Hurrell, for most people is considered to be the person who defined this style of Hollywood glamour with his visual and lighting techniques. His lighting techniques used light and shadow to sculpt the face of his subjects, using his techniques, Hurrell creates portraits of the stars which look to be otherworldly, which elevated the stars to these 'god-like' figures. This supplemented the studios clever ruse to deceive the public to create and control the personas of the stars.

This 'was a carefully constructed illusion that was fed to the movie-going public, who in turn worshipped these God-like figures and fed their desires by purchasing tickets at the box office, thereby fueling the studios that produced the images to begin with' (Bean, 2015). This era in cinema and photography is now known as Hollywood's golden age, due to narrative and visual style cinema which stretches between the 1910s to 1960s. These photographers made the movie stars, who were 'ordinary people', into the icons and idols of that time. The photographs made to be viewed in a different realm that went beyond the every day to mask the ordinary. These photographs were shot mainly on

8x10 inch black and white sheet film which creates a soft-focus image and being high quality. Using moody, tungsten lighting (similar to those that were used in cinema) helped to create the atmosphere of otherworldly, this style of photography changed the appearance of people. These portraits required an understanding, and a specific way of lighting, framing, gesture and styling that were the critical components for creating the Hollywood glamour look. The techniques that were used consisted of having a sharp contrast of light and dark, along with seductive poses. These elements were all made to make the actors look their best. Not only was the photographer critical to the success of the image, but the studio made sure that they had a team of hairstylists, make-up artists and set designers on hand. As Marion Douras, an actress, commented at the time, 'With me, it was five percent talent and ninety-five percent publicity' (Hicks, Nisperos, 2000).

In his book, *Artifice and atmosphere: the Visual Culture of Hollywood Glamour photography* (2018), Patrick Keating suggests that glamour could change anyone, that they too could be transformed into this worshipped, better, and more attractive person. The studios had a variety range of subjects that they wanted portraits of. The studios judged whether the subject was attractive enough to look glamorous in a photograph. Rather than define glamour as a trait that all Hollywood stars possessed, Keating refers to Katherine Albert, who is an American screenwriter, play writer and television writer. Albert defined glamour as the trait of a particular category of character or star 'the sophisticated and mysterious woman. In this way, glamour marked a type. The members of the glamorous type were not identical, but they drew from a limited and recognizable repertoire of attributes (e.g., slicked-down blond hair) and behaviors (e.g., emotional distance)'. (Keating, 2017) This behaviour of emotional distance alluded to

the god-like imagery that you can look, but cannot touch. This person is removed from reality, becoming part of a dream-like world. In the article by *The Take*, quotes Alfred Hitchcock, who was a highly regarded English film director whose films are studied among filmmakers. Hitchcock said 'he had a preference for blondes because they are less suspicious than brunettes. When a blonde does something deceitful or unexpected, it's a greater shock than when a dark-haired girl does the same. He also said they simply photograph better in black and white, and that blondes made for better victims and better symbols of heroism'. (Saporito, 2016).

These portraits usually carry a mood and dramatic expression, and it can also have a narrative-like quality which can be powerful. The power of narrative can influence others that read and interpret it. Like films after it has ended, our emotions may change due to the film as the viewer relates within the movie. Narratives can happen with photographs too, which makes it a powerful tool. Advertisements use this to influence people where to spend money. These glamour portraits were advertisements for the major studios, selling for the box office cinema, as the audiences would want to watch their favourite icons on the big screen. Narratives can also create more of similarity or familiarity within the image, as this happens, this makes the person feel more relatable to the image. Narratives are usually domestic within this genre as this is more relatable. While the way the images are crafted, using techniques of cinema, they make the stars in the images untouchable at the same time as they seem to be on a pedestal.

These still images that are like a film still, creating a mood that relates to the narrative styling similar to cinema, the viewer is experiencing more than just looking at someone's

portrait. With these Hollywood glamour portraits, the viewer has a narrative experience within the image that can be read and interpreted. The image tells a story with only using a single frame.

In, *Photography and Cinema* by David Campany (2008), Campany comments on how photography and cinema are both indebted to each other. This relationship is not just one-way; photography also helped to inform directors of how a scene could be filmed. Campany refers to the film still of *Rear Window* by Alfred Hitchcock, 1954. 'This image could only be a film still. It looks like nothing else, except perhaps the kind of contemporary art photograph that is indebted to cinema'. (Campany, 2008). The staged narrative conveys ideas that the film has brought to still photography. Cinema narratives can create otherworldly scenes, they are the goal of the Hollywood portraiture as actors were seen as out of this world. The differences that these mediums have, Cinema sees things unfolding in front of the viewer, whereas the photograph is a still from the past. Cinema and film have framing, object-hood and time. Time is a crucial factor for separating the two mediums. Without time photographs hold things motionless, even with a long exposure, the outcome will be a still image. The film is played out in front of us at a predetermined speed whereas the viewer of a photograph can take their own time to exam each detail.

Campany also draws from theorist Roland Barthes. Who is a French theorist and philosopher he argues they within 'In cinema we do not to see this excess, since the individual images are not there long enough for us to contemplate them. Imagine a cinema audience watching a narrative film. At any one moment most eyes will be

focused on just a small portion of the screen, usually a face or something on the move. Given just a single frame to look at, the gazes will begin to drift around the image in more individual ways. Eyes and mind can wander, chancing upon details beyond the conscious intention of the director or performers.' (Barthes as cited in Company, 2008, pg 134).

In film, time passes and the focus is on the main points, with staged photography, the details are all present for the viewer. The photographer needs to be aware of the slight details as these make an impact as the viewing experience is determined on the viewer and details are all there to be examined. Using studio lights helps to direct the viewer's first impression, photography techniques using lights to direct what is most important. In this case with Hollywood portraiture, and most portraiture is the eyes, this is why the photographer would dodge that area which in layman's terms would brighten the area. The eyes are considered an important key feature in a portrait as the eyes are a vital area for the viewer. Afterwards, the viewer will pick out all other details, usually going to the next brightest area of the image. One of the strengths of staged portraiture, being able to capture more for the viewer with a single frame. This can make Hollywood staged portraits more powerful. In a film, the viewer is continuously viewing each frame (around 30 frames per second), and as time moves and frames change, the still image creates a more detailed and intimate response. The viewer has the presence of the still long enough to idolise the image in their own time and gaze upon the beauty of the image.

Barthes argues that a photographic image could have the potential to be stronger for its capability for storytelling. 'Film frames were rich in association and full of dramatic possibility' (Campany, 2008, pg 135). storytelling in photographs allows the viewers to stop to think about what is happening within the still. For Hollywood glamour, it was essential to create a narrative. Sometimes this was used by having the subject, the actor, having a sense of movement, where the subject looked as though they were in a moment, doing something, This allows us to create the narrative in our minds, what is happening? How did it get to here? Furthermore, what is happening after?. These techniques seem to be in motion, posing in a way that is seen as acting rather than posing. This is similar to cinema, where the subject seems not to acknowledge that there is even a camera. Even if they are looking directly at the camera, it seems more like they are looking at the audience of the portrait, by the gestures the subject uses to make it seem like they are looking at a person.

By the late 1970s artists' awareness of the film still was opening up new possibilities for photography. Cindy Sherman...who began to make staged narrative photographs around the same time, were attracted by this compact power that seemed to set in motion meanings that could never be resolved fully (2008, pg.135).

Sherman's is a fine art photographer who works mostly with characterised self-portraits. Her work, titled *Untitled Film Stills*, 1977-1980, copied the cinematic style of narrative, Sherman staged herself as different female characters drawn from a variety of popular

and art-house films. Sherman's stills sometimes resemble publicity shots or freeze frames of films, creating the 'classical narrative cinema in three senses: its visual style, the camera's look at the scene and the performer's directed looking, often at a point somewhere outside the frame' (Campany, 2008, pg 136).

Such narrative styling from cinema is awkward to pull off, especially when people react when they see a camera because, as they become conscious of it, it can ruin the staged narrative. An image photographed by Cindy Sherman (1980) *Untitled Film Still #53*, the viewer can see a close up of her facial expression looking over to her left, face unamused with framing her on the edge of the frame while there is negative space on her right. For some, this can feel as if she is staring at someone, unamused by a situation. This narrative makes the viewer think the photograph the viewer sees is in the middle of a moment. What has happened, what is happening now and what will happen afterwards is something we ask ourselves when we see these sorts of images, as they are open-ended images. Another image of Sherman, which makes us question the narrative is (1977) *Untitled Film Still #4*, where she looks like she is outside a door. As a voyeur of this image, the viewer is put in an open narrative. Is she looked out of her room, is she trying to get in a room that is a lover, or did she leave the room contemplating whether she should go back in? These are some questions that the audience may be left with. These images are strong and make us think and reflect wherein most films the viewer is usually a witness, not needing to think and reflect. Images make us reflect and look for details within the image. Sherman's work that's highly influenced by cinema. The 'images that are well-known because they represented

ideas everyone knew – the photos were roles and faces the audience has seen before. Despite the series carrying the sense of familiarity'.(Public Delivery, 2019)

Sherman Utilised cinema's effect of the narrative by using film techniques to create staged photographs into contemporary. These ideas looked at How has Hollywood glamour within cinema influenced staged portraiture within contemporary photography.

The idea of staged portraiture, recontextualise a cinematic still.

The staged portrait is indebted to cinematic films. In photographs, when the photographer similarly stages people the way cinema uses actors to act out a role in a film. To imply there is a narrative in photographs the subject must be photographed, using the right gestures, as if they are in a film still, to look as if they are not aware of the camera. When doing staged narrative portraiture, the person being photographed should not pose like there is a camera. Similar to breaking the fourth wall in cinema, this removes the dream-like quality, thus removing the narrative. Some photographers also use help from film crews, with the help of lighting and construct a scene to create photographic work. The narratives seem more durable as this helps enhance film-like quality to the image. This visual narrative as single still image is done by creating a moment from within the middle of doing something.

Contemporary photographer Gregory Crewdson is an example of this today. Crewdson takes narrative, cinematic style photographs. He sets up the frame much like a Hollywood film, utilising actors and film crews.

This in-between reaction invites the viewer to read the image by putting pieces together for the viewer to pick out, the viewer does not know what has happened or why the subject matter (the person) is there. This suspense that is seen in the image helps create a staged narrative portrait in still photography. In the image *2014, Woman at Sink*, photographed by Gregory Crewdson, the viewer can see similar gestures to Hollywood glamour where they seem to be unclear and allow for possibilities of reading the images, which is also seen in Cindy Sherman images. The gestures make the viewer wonder what is going through the mind of the subject.

In the book, *Contemporary Femme Fatale*, (2017) Media theorist Katherine Farrimond discusses how Hollywood portraits are now in the realm of contemporary. This realm of contemporary is due to being within today's contemporary feminist that these genre and gender politics have within the cinematic realm. In the contemporary sense that media and viewers have put upon the female identity in cinema and photography, these are somewhat contradictory as one looks at the women being in power and a strong female while also being looked at as a female figure being sexualised for the viewers.

Farrimond suggests that femme fatales hold a significant role in cinema history looking at notions of power, representing sexual allure and danger. In Hollywood portraiture, and the actor role in the image. This becomes a position of power and has this alluring effect due to the stylised narrative structure in cinema. These notions of power are what makes these Hollywood glamour portraits into the realm of contemporary.

Farimond refers to the work of Laura Mulvey in regards to how women are seen or are looked at in cinema for visual pleasure. Farrimond argues that glamour is a powerful form of female identity that can be turned into another form of objectification. This is because they are more seen as mystical figures and not 'real' people, which makes the viewer see them as objects to be looked at, while also being in power figures to look up to. These images made the stars more significant than life as well as something to aspire towards. Nowadays, in a post-feminist realm, this relation with women in power, especially being the main characters in a film, they are inherently being involved with gender politics. Even today, the strong female characters are being critiqued by the mainstream media as a one-dimensional idea being within contemporary feminism.

Character styles and the femme fatale's relationship between power, femininity, realism and fantasy. Can impact the viewers reading of the character. Each character has an in-between or mixture of pleasure and power and this is usually seen from strong female characters. Farrimond comments that, in the feminist discourses around representation, beauty standards of these stars are put on a pedestal for objects of viewing. That glamorisation of a female is objectifying and sexualising. However 'The femme fatale is not an easy figure for feminism, but the range and complexity of her representations, and the quantities in which such representations are still appearing, mean that her potential for challenging simplistic understandings of the depiction of female power in mainstream contemporary cinema cannot be ignored' (Farrimond, 2017).

These are not just seen in femme fatale but most leading female character roles in film and stills. This is important to be aware of with Hollywood glamour portraits, as this identifies within the contemporary feminism, It is good to be aware of how these photographic works and character types can be seen today.

For me, these notions of pleasure and power make these images more powerful and in-depth. As I wanted to create portraits that were more than the 'typical' modern standard portraits. These photographs are meant to be seen not just a portrait, but also having a sense of a narrative and emotion to them, which the viewers could relate to. Using techniques that were used in the Hollywood glamour publicity shots. I staged the photographs in a studio using the same, tungsten lighting, subject direction and framing techniques. The photographs don't look as though the subject had posed in front of a camera. Similar to film, pretended that there was not a camera to pose for. I had the subjects usually looking away from the camera and posing as they were in the middle of a moment, in order to convey a feeling or mood. Hurrell's photographic work has been an inspiration for my photographic works by the way he lit and framed his images and to create mood and allure the images has in his photographic works.

Gregory Crewdson and Cindy Sherman's work, which is influenced by the cinema, used the techniques of posing the subject. These techniques will be utilised in my

photographs. They explored these techniques for fine art contemporary works of staged narrative portraiture reminiscent of cinematic stills. These works allowed the viewer to relate to the familiarity of cinema and also open up the viewer's view and interpretation.

The works I have created, are those of staged contemporary portraits as they are staged in a studio setting and the reconstruction of the Hollywood publicity shots by glamorising of ordinary people. I am using light to control the viewers' direction focusing on the face first while also using unnatural lighting to create an otherworldly image. while using gestures to create a narrative and mood. These works are within the contemporary feminism that is relevant in today's world. Contemporary feminism may be seen in work like these because of the objectification and the allure which can be sexualised for some. Hollywood glamour photography has the elements of narrative due to its influence from being critical with cinema. The staging of characters that the women portrayed and the personas of film they were in influenced staged portrait photography, with other photographers using cinema modes of construct to create staged portraiture. Cinema has influenced the staged portraits within my work. Using the aesthetics and elements of film such as the lighting which helps to focuses your direction of viewing and carrying a narrative within the subject's gestures to convey a sense of feeling, mood, scene and another world in photographic still.

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